



Smartkids Riverside Talk

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Term 2 Focus: Sharing, Caring and Friendship

Friendships are important in helping children develop emotionally and socially. They provide a training ground for trying out different ways of relating to others. Through interacting with friends, children learn the give and take of social behavior in general. They learn how to set up rules, how to weigh alternatives and make decisions when faced with dilemmas. They experience fear, anger, aggression and rejection. They learn how to win, how to lose, what's appropriate, what's not. They learn about social standing and power - who's in, who's out, how to lead and how to follow, what's fair and what's not. They learn that different people and different situations call for different behaviors and they come to understand the viewpoints of other people. Friends provide companionship and stimulation for each other, and they find out who they are by comparing themselves to other children - who's bigger, faster, who can add better, who can catch better. They learn that they're both similar to and different from others. Through friendships and belonging to a group children improve their sense of self-esteem.

Encouraging children's friendships

Friendships are not just a luxury; they are a necessity for healthy psychological development. Research shows that children with friends have a greater sense of well-being, better self-esteem and fewer social problems as adults than individuals without friends. On the other hand, children with friendship problems are more likely than other children to feel lonely, to be victimized by peers, to have problems adjusting to school, and to engage in deviant behaviors.

What Parents Can Do

- Let your child know that you feel friendships are important and worth the effort.
- Respect your child's social style; some children do best with a host of friends, and some do best with a few close friends. Some make friends quickly, and some warm up to friends slowly.
- Find practical ways you can help your child make room in his/her life for being with other children. This is especially important if your child is shy or reluctant about peer interactions. For example, be flexible about family schedules so that your child can find time to be with friends. Offer your home or offer to accompany children on outings. You might also make arrangements for your family to spend time with another family that has a similar-age child. Or, you could make concrete suggestions, such as "You can invite somebody to go to the pool with us on Saturday."





Although some parents may sometimes feel as if they're being too pushy by adopting such strategies, recently completed research shows that children who were more well adjusted socially had parents who were more involved in their children's social activities.

If your child is finding it difficult to be with other children or to make friends, which may be the case with children having hearing, speech or other problems, or who are very shy, try to create easier situations for socializing. You might invite just one child over to play, since larger groups complicate social interaction. Monitor their play and intervene when necessary to help things along. It's best to help them reach their own solution to a difficulty rather than solving the problem for them.

Model appropriate social behavior; children learn a great deal from their parents. If your child seems increasingly anxious about socializing, shows no interest in peers or is consistently unable to get along with classmates, consider professional help.



Adapted from http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/emotional_foundations_for_learning/communicating/friendships.html Alice Pope, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, St. John's University, has authored numerous publications on peer relations.

